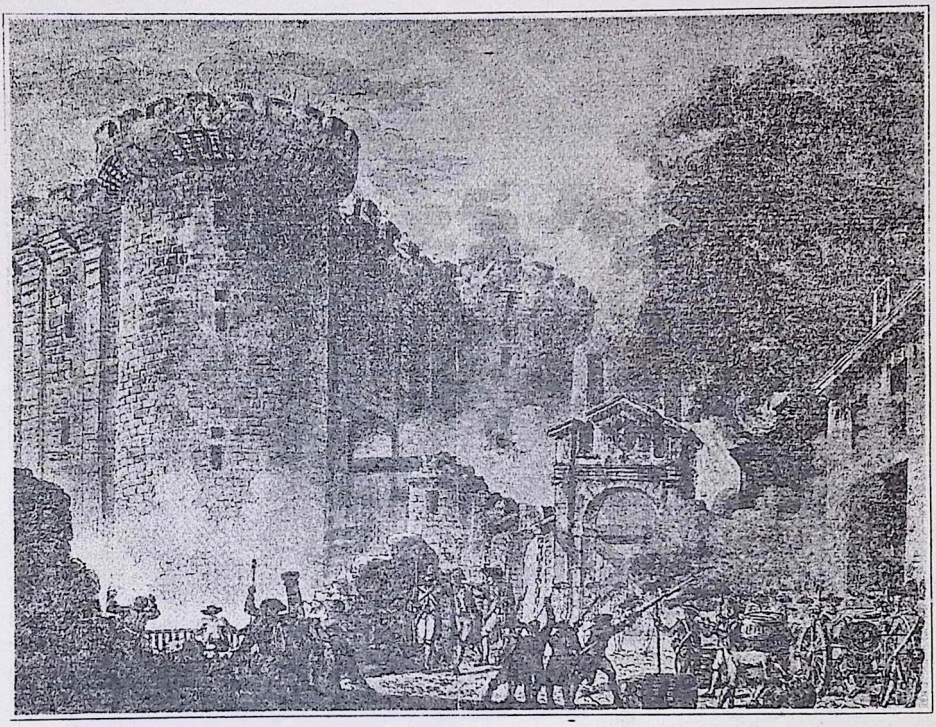
Prison Survival



Prisoner Support

Introduction

The aim I had in publishing this pamphlet was to bring together various pieces of writing which would be of practical help to those facing prison and for those wanting to provide support for friends inside.

Section 1 consists of pieces written by prisoners and ex - prisoners about their experiences inside. I asked them to write anything which they thought would be useful for someone facing prison for the first time, and these articles are what I was sent in response. Some of the contributors served or are serving sentences of up to 20 years while others were inside for as little as a couple of weeks. Their experiences vary, as does what they have written - some focusing on describing prison life, others on emotional strategies for survival, others on useful hints or tips.

I made it clear when asking for contributions that I was not trying to compile a list of specific prison procedures and regulations. These vary over time and from prison to prison and inevitably I would have ended up publishing inaccurate and out of date information.

Information about prison regulations, prisoners rights and so on can be obtained from the Prisoners Advice Service at the address on page 32. Where such details are given in this pamphlet they should be taken as no more than a part of the individual writer's experience.

I hope that these writings will help to lessen the 'fear of the unknown' which surrounds prison. If you think that you might get sent down one day, or if you know you will, then the more you know about the subject in advance the more you can mentally prepare for it. I think it can also help just to hear from someone who has been there before. I find that unpleasant and dangerous situations are always easier to deal with when there's someone else in them with me.

The second section of this pamphlet deals with prisoner support. All these pieces are written by prisoners and those involved in prisoner support work. Most of this section consists of writing which gives some ideas of what action can be taken in support of prisoners, but I have also included some accounts, by prisoners, which I think illustrate how important and effective solidarity from the outside can be.

With the exception of the Rob Thaxton / Free interview on

page 32, all the contributions to this pamphlet are from people in England. This is not because I don't think a lot of worthwhile stuff on the subject has come out of other countries, but because I wanted to limit the scope of the pamphlet to what would be most directly relevant to its readership, and keep it simple to produce. I can also think of many people who I could have asked to contribute but didn't. Who I asked and who I didn't was down to little more than chance and, while I do not want this to be an on-going project of mine, there is no reason why similar publications should not be produced by other people which could include their own or other people's work.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the illustrations were provided by people in prison.

The cost of this booklet has been set to cover the costs of printing and distribution. In the unlikely event that it ends up making a profit, all the money will be donated to one or more of the support groups or campaigns listed in the contacts list on page 32.

The opinions expressed in this booklet are those of the individual contributors. Within the boundaries of being pro-prisoner support, I have not selected the articles to push any one agenda, nor do I necessarily agree with everything in them.

It is a sad fact that in recent years many activists who have been imprisoned have received little or no practical support from those outside. As revolutionaries we need to create a culture of mutual aid where we provide support for each other, and where everyone knows that solidarity is guaranteed for them when they need it. Nowhere is this more important than in supporting fellow activists who end up in jail. This pamphlet is a part of that ongoing process.

Section 1
Experiences of imprisonment

Preparing for Prison – The View from Inside

Imprisonment as a form of punishment can be traced back to Greek times, but until relatively recently long-term incarceration was extremely rare, only flourishing in modern times after transportation to 'the colonies' became unviable (in no small part due to the American Revolution). Traditionally, those that offended against society were punished publicly, generally in the most brutal way, from the stocks to the gibbet. Public executions, often with attendant torture and/or mutilation, were the norm in this country until the 17th century. Even when they were abolished it was not out of any sense of decency or humanity, but according to the Oxford History of the Prison, because they had "become the occasion of rowdiness and disgust – both because the crowd had begun to identify with the victim, not the executioner, and because the spectacle had become revolting, offending a new sensibility about pain and bodily integrity. Thus, it became desirable to mete out punishment away from the public gaze."

Today, prison is still very much a closed world, and while within the past two decades TV cameras have occasionally been able to show a very limited view of life behind bars, they rarely capture anything more than that which the authorities wish them to see. The true misery of imprisonment is deliberately kept secret from the general public, while the right-wing press and unscrupulous politicians conspire to present a picture of cushy 'holiday camps' and 'health farms'. The prison authorities do everything within their power (legal and illegal) to prevent investigative journalists having contact with prisoners and vice-versa, while Michael Howard and Jack Straw imposed a ban preventing visiting journalists reporting anything at all. Though the ban has subsequently been deemed unlawful, the vast majority of journalists are so lazy, cowardly, and/or clueless that it might as well still be in place.

With the British prison population currently growing at a rate of four hundred a week, and New Labour's Draconian policies criminalising dissent, as a political activist it is more likely that you will see the inside of a prison cell than at any time in recent history. For those committed to the overthrow of the State, imprisonment has to be seen as an occupational hazard, and as such it's better to consider it beforehand, rather than when it's too late.

During my life I've spent time in over 20 British prisons (plus at least a dozen more I've visited or 'stopped over' at), that includes local prisons, remand centres, long-term Category B prisons, all Britain's maximum security dispersal prisons, a couple of Category A units and 16 segregation units. I've been around a bit, but I've never been anywhere near a low security or 'open' prison, and though I correspond with a number of women prisoners, I've obviously never been held in a women's prison. So while I think I'm pretty well qualified to talk about the prison experience, there are limits to what I know, and inevitably this piece reflects that.

If you know you're going to be imprisoned, at least that gives you a headstart. Maybe you can even talk to someone who's been in your local nick, and who knows the rules and can give you an idea what to expect. The 'unknown' is the scariest thing of all, isn't it? Prison is the worst thing our society has.

The most common fear, certainly among men, seems to be that if they get locked up they'll 'have to go in the showers with Mr. Big.' Forget that, predatory homosexuality is as rare in British prisons as malt whisky, in fact in some prisons it's a great deal rarer. There's probably more chance of you being raped or sexually assaulted 'outside' than in here. I have never actually come across a single occurrence.

Then there's the fear of non-sexual violence, are you going to be locked up with a load of thugs and psychopaths who'll cut your throat as soon as look at you? Again, this is largely exaggerated, but violence does exist in prison. However, it's a relatively simple matter to minimise the likelihood of being attacked, in my experience there's far less random violence in prison than in wider society. I was in an adult long-term prison at 19, and the only time I've been attacked it's been by the screws.

Staying safe comes down to basics, stay alert and learn some manners, prison is a close environment containing too many people, so manners are extra important. Be polite to people, treat them with mutual respect, don't be nosy or impinge on their limited personal space, never borrow things without asking, don't boast or bullshit, never grass anyone up, and even more importantly, avoid drugs (heroin) and stay away from junkies. When I was at Full Sutton in 1996, there was an average of one stabbing a week, but almost all of them were related to smack.

While adult prisons, particularly long-term ones, tend to be a fairly mature environment, 'Young Offenders Institutions' (for those under 21) can be different, and violence less easy to avoid. The general advice still applies though, be assertive not aggressive, but don't let people take liberties with you, and if necessary be prepared to fight. Some self-defence training may give you an edge, but be warned that prison fights are always dirty, you can expect to be bitten, scalded, stabbed, coshed, and/or attacked by multiple assailants. Attacks are likely to take place in the showers or when the victim is still in bed.

In reality it's not other prisoners you should be worried about, they will become your friends and comrades, in the harsh prison environment bonds will be forged that can last a lifetime. Your problems will come from the system, and from the screws, particularly if you're a person of integrity. From the very first moment you enter prison your principles, your sense of selfhood, and your very humanity will be under attack. If you are to survive unbroken, you must resist all attempts to turn you into a numbered, subjugated, compliant piece of jail-fodder, a 'Stepford Prisoner' whose had their spine and brain removed. You are after all not just an individual, but a member of a movement, and those that come after you will be judged by how you yourself behave.

Unfortunately, for those of you entering prison today, the level of political consciousness among British prisoners is at the lowest point for many years. Divide and rule scams like the loathsome 'Incentives and Earned Privileges' scheme have undermined solidarity, and in-cell TVs and heroin have helped a

culture of selfishness to develop. You will hear people come out with things like, "I can't afford to get involved" or "I've done my bit" or "I just want to get out." Ignore these wankers, they're just trying to justify their own cowardice. Everybody wants to get out of these rotten places, but how do you want to get out, on your feet or on your knees? Resistance and solidarity will always exist within prisons, and if you have anything about you at all, your place is with that resistance, not with the grovellers and forelock-tuggers who shit on their fellow cons in the foolish belief that they can make a comfortable life for themselves in here.

Prison Receptions, the entry point into any jail (unless you go straight to the block), have changed a lot since the days when you were very likely to be met with a beating, but they are still inevitably an unpleasant experience. It is here that your prison file will be opened, that you will be given a number, where strangers will begin to address you by your surname only, where others will decide what clothes you can wear and what possessions you can have, and where you will receive your first strip-search. It is in Reception that the battle begins.

The first Prison Reception I was ever in was at Canterbury in 1980. There were certainly worse places back then, but there were still some vicious screws working there. In every nick in the country they used to read you a little speech at Reception, part of which went, "You will call all prison officers 'Sir'." So it didn't take long for my first confrontation to come, I would not, and will not, be forced to call anyone 'Sir'. Nor was I prepared to substitute 'boss' or 'guv'nor' as was acceptable in some prisons. Like a lot of principles it's ostensibly a small thing, it would be so easy to compromise, especially when almost everyone else does, but what are we without principles? Once you start abandoning them for the sake of convenience, who's to say where it will end? I remember a few years ago when I was forced onto a blanket protest at Durham. Having failed to intimidate and bully me into putting on the prison clothes, the screws tried persuasion, "You're alone down here in the block, away from your mates, nobody will even know you've put them on." But I'd have known, and the screws would have known, and that was enough.

Today there's no longer an obligation to call your captors 'Sir', and many nicks no longer require you to wear prison clothes, but your integrity will still be tested, and you will have to struggle to retain it. Relinquish it, and I imagine prison will have far more of a lasting effect on you than if you spend the whole of your sentence in the block.

Screws often behave like playground bullies, when you come into a new nick, they'll try it on to see how much they can get away with. A classic example is to try to get you to 'squat' or bend over during a strip-search – tell them to fuck off.

Every prison has its own rules about what you can and can't have, and they change constantly, but if you know you're getting sent down you can still try to be prepared. Often, little can be sent in after you're imprisoned, so have anything you need and might be able to have with you. Most prisons allow you to wear your own training shoes these days, so get yourself a good sturdy pair. Prisoners generally wear sports clothes, which are easily cared for, avoid black and dark blue colours which aren't always allowed, and go for cotton fabrics that will survive the prison laundry. A radio or small stereo will be useful, as will one or

wo books, and some basic stationery. A watch is more or less essential, ideally et one that doesn't require batteries, is tough and waterproof (so you can wear it n the shower), but not unduly expensive or ostentatious. While highly desirable, ood and drink and toiletries won't be allowed. If you smoke (and it's a big dvantage not to), you may be permitted to keep a small amount of tobacco. Make sure you have cash with you, so that you can buy phonecards and other tems you need from the prison shop.

There was a time when every cell contained a copy of the prison rules, and prisoners were required to read them. Now the prison authorities generally do their best to keep them secret, because they are so regularly broken. You will find it useful to consult the Prison Rules and Standing Orders, which outline your few rights and entitlements, and they should be available in the prison library. The Prison Service also publishes its own information booklets, but the contents are very selective. If you have difficulty getting hold of a copy of the rules, or think you are not getting what you're entitled to, as regards diet or exercise for example, either contact your solicitor or the Prisoners Advice Service at the address given on page 32. Prisoners' letters are generally censored, and so have to be handed in or posted with the envelopes unsealed. However, you may write to a solicitor or the Prisoners Advice Service in confidence under Prison Rule 39. Contrary to what you may be told, you do not have to allow a member of staff to seal the envelope for you, and if you do not have stamps you can ask for a 'Special Letter', which should be sent at public expense. Simply seal the envelope, write your name and 'Rule 39' on the back, and hand it in or post it in the box provided.

There is a good deal of variation in prison architecture, from the ancient cathedrals of human misery to the stark modern control-units. The accommodation parts of prisons are known as 'wings' or 'houseblocks', and they generally have cells on 'landings' or 'spurs' on more than one level, known as 'the ones', 'the twos' etc. Most modern prison cells are approximately 7ft x 11ft, but some are a good deal smaller, and in some prisons each cell may contain 2, or even 3, prisoners. Personally I am not prepared to share a space that small with another person, and if necessary will opt for a single cell in the block. Prisoners are having to spend more time locked in their cells than for many years, but you should not be 'banged up' for more than 23 hours at a time.

Prison really is a bizarre institution to come into, and it'll take you a while to get used to it. Humans are an adaptable species though, and within a few weeks you'll probably find you're cracking on like an old lag. If you're on remand though, this can be a time when you fuck up, and it's something I always warn people about. Time is different in jail, particularly when you're first locked up, a couple of days can seem like a month. It's a harsh environment, and you'll be spending a lot of time with the same people. Many of these will turn out to be good friends, but always try to bear in mind that in reality, you've known them for days or weeks, not years, and that not everyone in jail tells the truth about themselves. In particular, be wary about discussing the details of your case with those you hardly know, too many people wind up in court with former cell-mates giving evidence against them. Also be careful about giving out your home address or personal details until you know your new friends a lot better.

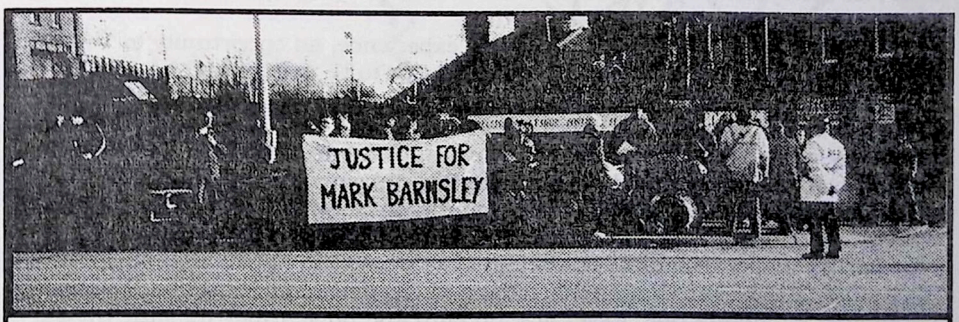
There are a thousand scams and tricks in jail, cons are extremely inventive

people and are always one step ahead of the screws. As you pick up your jail-craft you'll learn everything from how to pass a cigarette from one end of the wing to the other, how to make prison 'hooch' without yeast, how to make weapons out of next to nothing, how to defeat electronic door systems, how to make a cup of tea without a kettle, and all sorts of other survival skills. When you first get locked up, you'll doubt that you could last more than week in this environment, but in all likelihood you will, and will even share in the gallows humour endemic to this otherwise joyless existence.

The human spirit can flourish and triumph in the face of the darkest adversity, but I'm not going to tell you that prisons are anything other than utterly rotten places, particularly for those of us who have to endure year after year of long-term imprisonment. Prison kills you physically and psychologically, it's a living death, like being buried alive. I once read about a Native American woman who suddenly woke up from a coma as if from sleep. She wanted to know where her husband and her children were, but she'd been unconscious so long her husband had remarried and her children grown up. It's a tragic story, but at least she didn't have the slow torture of having to watch, helpless, as her life slipped away from her, together with everything she cared about. That's how it is for most long-term prisoners, and many lose their families, homes, jobs, savings, and possessions even before their cases come to trial. Hang onto your integrity, because when the System's finished with you and spits you back out on the street, it may be all you have left.

But hey, nobody said it was going to be easy, if it was easy they wouldn't call it 'struggle' would they? As political activists we're the lucky ones in here, given a rare opportunity to get inside the machine and act like a virus. As an activist you're not locked up to take a holiday, there's a real struggle to be fought in here, so keep militant and get involved.

Mark Barnsley,
6th March 2002,
Whitemoor Prison.
England.



Noise demonstration outside Wakefield prison. February 2001

Be free wherever you are!

rison is one of the worst human inventions. It is an alienating place and egative experience (better not tried first hand!), it's anti-human – it intervenes r restricts every movement you make, every choice you could make, intercept he air you breathe, how much sky you can see ...

osing one's liberty is indeed one of the most painful experiences and dear losses eside losing life. At least to me.

s well as robbing you of liberty, in prison you need to forget about privacy and hings like proper rest. Your time and space are always interfered with or nterrupted.

n the face of all this, one has to search for and dig deep in and hold tight and irm to your inner freedom and dignity. Nothing and no-one can take these away or compromise them no matter what. Respect yourself (and others) everywhere and always and everything will be better. Free your mind and spirit. Raise above and beyond your physical hardships and realities and a whole new world and possibilities open up. Always remember no-one can stop the time and just as you came in to prison your day to come out must and will come. Prison will only be a chapter in your life, and no matter how long and hard it is it's never all doom and gloom.

You will encounter lots of human mediocrity and wickedness, selfishness, greed, arrogance and pettiness. But there is also kindness, humour, some friendship, some humanity. No matter how bad are your conditions and treatment, don't let anyone take away your humanity.

Prison is a negative experience to be avoided! If you're in prison because of 'politics' then don't regret your commitment (but always review your actions!). Be prepared for a new struggle, new different serious sacrifices. No matter who you are there is a lot of daily 'wear and tear' and waste of energy and time. A lot of restrictions, crazy rules and contradictions etc. All the time something tests your patience or tolerance. Lots of frustrations, also lots of ignorance, cynicism and maybe some provocations if you're 'politically motivated'. But then you must 'fight back', learn to be patient, let go of a lot of worries, demands, expectations etc. Compromise but don't compromise yourself. Avoid unnecessary battles and arguments. Don't trust easily let go your guards except in the fewer cases. Defend yourself and answer back or fight them only on major important issues. Don't let the system wear you out of use what its strengths! We each have different circumstances and 'lines' to draw.

At the same time prison can be a positive experience, an opportunity to 'win' and 'grow' despite 'the costs'. As I said you can learn to be patient and tolerant, let go of a lot of worries. Learn about yourself and others. Reflect on your life, on the case, on your actions. Think about your future.

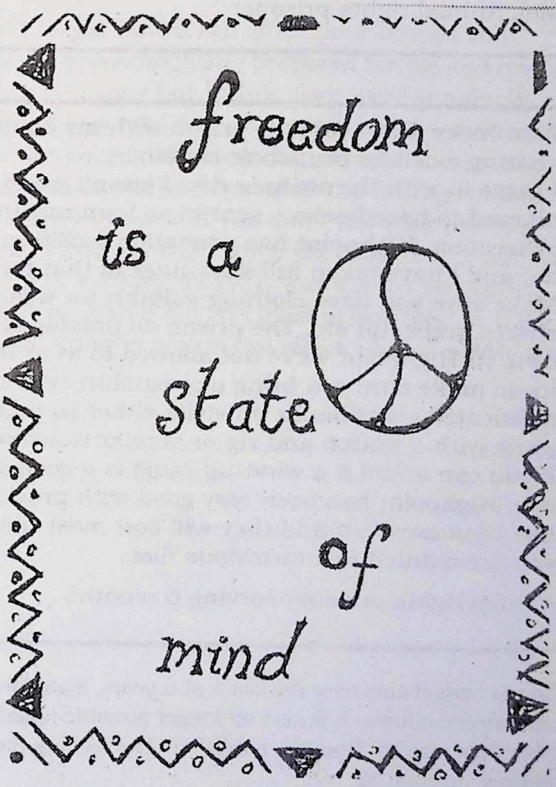
Learn/try new things or do things you've always wanted to do. Try to concentrate on what you can do rather than can't do. Develop your own mini routine or program, e.g read 1 book this week or month, do cell work outs etc, try hobbies, writing, reading etc. Go to the gym, get fresh air when possible. Do something creative like art, craft, music or writing. Try to maintain health and mind. Maintain relations through phone, letters, visits, live mind. Altogether continue life though a different one. Never give up faith and hope. Enjoy the little things, maximise use of whatever is possible and available, but keep an eye out for changes for the better and remember there is a world much bigger than prison

and just as real. And keep some 'bridges' to that.
One can find a lot of inspiration from prison writings (there are some anthologies) and books like Mandela's 'Long Walk to Freedom', Steve Biko, poems like 'Reading Gaol' by Oscar Wilde and R. Loveloce. It's good to remember you're part of struggles and traditions worldwide defending humanity/ for justice. No matter why you're in prison remember you're not alone. You will always matter to your loved ones and they will always matter to you.
If you were engaged in some struggle. you remain so but in different ways. You can and should maintain dialogue and interaction about the issues and concerns with others.
If you're in prison for other reasons still prison is a phase of struggle and possible positive change. Issues about your family, friends and community are much the same. It's a social and psychological 'learning pot'. Indeed no matter why you end up behind bars, one needs to try to reconnect to our common humanity. Stay strong, be proud (but not arrogant or self-important). Be humble, learn to give and take from others. No matter how small your world becomes and limited your livlihood you can still broaden your horizons and keep your mid open and heart free.
It's a victory to survive prison without too many scars or 'distortions'. You must and can do it – even though it does take its toll. It is also possible to emerge better and undiminished. That's a challenge!

What can people do outside?
- Stay committed and connected
- Maintain letters, visits, phone, remember each other
- Send practical things: stamps, trainers, T-shirt, music, books, mags, jokes postal orders, some hobbies. Depending on local rules
- Promise each other to look after yourselves!
-support the case where appropriate
- help the family where needed

What else?
Don't know! That's all for now.
La lutta continua

Samar Alami
Palestinian miscarriage of justice prisoner serving 20 years.



Whilst being sent to prison wouldn't rank as top of your list of 'must dos' it's also not a case of disappearing into the depths of some hostile hell. Yes you've lost your freedom for a period of time but as in all situations there are ways of improving your lot. One of the biggest enemies is boredom, you must aim to keep your mind and body active. I would advise a course of study in the prison education department, make good use of your time to improve yourself. Since being inside I have successfully completed an Open University course in Social Science and am now working on a level 2 course in philosophy. I've also become computer literate and have made extensive use of the prison library to improve my education. I also use the gym regularly, physical exercise aids relaxation like nothing else when you're inside.

As a strict ethical vegan food issues have caused me some problems in the prison environment. In my experience a polite but firm approach in dealing with issues is vital. In this respect outside support has been a lifeline – the Vegan Prisoner Support Group (address on page 32) have been of invaluable assistance. It's also important that you make complaints through the relevant channels, it will soon become clear to staff that (as in my case veganism) is something that you won't compromise on.

Mel, Animal rights prisoner

I am lucky that I came to prison with my co-defendant and we have been sharing a cell for our whole sentence.

I came in with the attitude that I wasn't going to waste a single day – We are allowed to have books sent in so I am reading lots of books about anti – vivisection. Highpoint has education facilities, which I think most prisons do, and I have taken full advantage of that too.

Make sure you have clothing suitable for wearing to the gym – i.e trainers, shorts, tracksuit etc. The prison do provide stuff but it's nice to have your own. At Highpoint we're not allowed to wear button up or zip up tops on visits so make sure you bring a sweatshirt type of top. We are not allowed any elasticated waist bands on visits either so make sure you have a pair of jeans with a button and zip or similar trousers.

If you can afford it a wind-up radio is a good idea and cheaper in the long run. Highpoint has been very good with providing us our vegan diet. VPSG has been excellent and they will sort most things out for you. Remember you are entitled to a nutritious diet.

Animal rights prisoner serving 6 months

Due to budget cuts over the last 5 or 6 years, many prisons now have virtually no education facilities. It is also no longer possible to get books sent in to most prisons, other than directly from the publisher. Try sending them from Haven Distribution - address on page 32

If you're expecting prison and you smoke, stop before you get banged up. It may seem a little preachy but life is a lot easier if you don't smoke. On arrival you're hassled off of everyone you meet for your 'burn' (baccy). It's like being back at school – but a lot more serious. Other cons are trying it on and testing you out. If you have 'burn' don't lend it out 'cause you've got to get it back or you lose face. If you smoke and haven't got any you've either gotta scrounge yourself or put yourself through the misery of stopping – bad enough outside, you don't need any more hassle as it is. A lot of the trouble inside is over 'baccy – when you go through induction you get a miserly amount of what looks like pipe baccy – it's got to last until you get your first canteen order – it took 10 days to get mine through. If you're lucky enough to have money sent in plus your wage you can get by OK as long as you don't smoke. A tobacco habit is very hard to keep up when your wages are £7.50 – that's for everything you might need. A lot of cons who get themselves in debt end up putting themselves into protective custody rather than facing their debtors and taking a beating – which does happen. This may all seem a bit harsh over a smoke but the only hassle I've experienced has been over debt. Prison's a bad enough experience without having all this hassle over a cigarette.

If you're expecting prison – don't forget how it can affect your friends and family. I don't think my mates were psychologically prepared for me and my co-accused getting custody, sounds a bit soppy but I think they were genuinely shocked and upset when our verdict was read out – I don't know the answer to this but it's worth discussing before your trial. Informing parents and loved ones needs to be done sensitively and tactfully. Remember the feelings of loss and pain that must go through a parents mind. If you don't tell your parents where you are make sure they don't find out from some idiot blurting it out – a mate of mine told his Mother he was working away (it was a short sentence) only for some bozo to ask the poor woman if her son liked prison food in the post office. Quite a funny story but being in prison can affect a lot of people and not just the prisoner.

Anti-fascist prisoner serving 9 months

Inside Story / Be Prepared

In the present climate of the ever-encroaching police state, it's fair comment to say that today's activists may well end up facing the prospect of a stay at one of her majesty's fine establishments. This article is aimed at shedding some light on what you can expect if you are unlucky enough to be given a stretch by the beak. It's based on my own experiences, which I hope others will find of interest and use.

For those not familiar with arrest etc., the first taste of cell life will start at the court you are tried in. Once sentenced, you are taken below to the gaol. After some paperwork you will be placed in a holding cell, usually until the courts are finished for the day. This can be hours if sentenced mid-morning, but fear not, the fun doesn't end there! When they are ready you will be herded (in cuffs) in to a meat wagon of some sort, for your roller coaster ride to your new home for the foreseeable future. This will also take hours, depending on where you are going. The van is likely to stop at several courts to pick up other assorted unfortunates. These meat wagons can be very hot/cold and uncomfortable, as the space in each compartment is very small. I'd mention at this point that the scum responsible for transporting you are, as far as I'm aware, obliged by law to transport you by other means if you are claustrophobic. If you are facing a bloody long trip then it's as well to try your luck and play on it. If nothing else it will cost them more money and why shouldn't you be comfortable? I know a few of the blokes arriving at Wandsworth blagged it, so give it a go. If however you end up in the sweatbox you should be given a sandwich and a cup of water.

Next stop is the prison. I'd say the first day i.e. from court to prison is the worst. The whole induction process can be frightening and bewildering. You will be experiencing a lot of unfamiliar things and you will feel vulnerable. Things will level out though so hang in there!

You will probably be in an A, B or C category nick (unless you're a politician or the filth!). You will be offloaded from the van and led into a reception area. A screw will ask you a few questions; 'how long?', 'what you in for?' type crap. They will give you a prison number, (possibly) a phone card (which will come out of your account), you'll be given some prison literature to peruse (useless) and they'll take your photo. Prisons (sometimes) issue you with emergency packs e.g. baccy, rizzlas etc. to bide you over until you get your first canteen, but I never got one. I'd say at this point that prison routine and rules vary from nick to nick.

You will then be put in to a holding cell, though this time you will be meeting fellow inmates for the first time. If you smoke someone will try to blag a fag. Some will no doubt act cocky and give it the big 'un. Remember, a lot of this is bravado, so try not to feel intimidated. Some cons can spot a first timer a mile away and may try to take advantage, others though may be more helpful. It's all a bit nerve-wracking!

Right, next will be the doctor. Basically a twat who couldn't care less will check you are breathing, job done... next! That's probably the last you'll see of them. You will then be called out by a screw, go over to a screen and be told to strip. If you are lucky, you'll be in a nick that allows you to wear your own clothes. If, however, like me, you're unlucky you'll be given the very chic prison designer gear that will no doubt become so sought after in the not too distant future! They then check your mouth, give you the once over (I'm told you no longer have to squat over a mirror!) and send you off for a shower. After that it's back to the holding cell while you wait for wing dispersal. You (might) also be given a meal before going onto the wing. Just before dispersal we were given a bedding pack, toiletries and cutlery (plastic – so you can't use them as weapons). By this stage I must admit I was feeling pretty bloody crappy. My dignity levels had hit an all time low and if, like me, you value your liberty, I felt that the world had just about ended! Add to this the general fear and paranoia that the screws and other inmates instilled in me, I wasn't feeling too great. But believe me you do work through it. Anyone who says they thought it was a piece of piss is a fucking liar. It affects the toughest nuts.

I suppose the whole reception process lasts a few hours; depending on how many bodies they are dealing with. It's been a bloody long day so far! On the walk to the wing you'll start to get your first impressions of life inside. The loud banging of the heavy steel doors and constant alarm bells going off become normal after a few days. You'll arrive at the wing where a charming officer will escort you to your cell. A card with your number will be put in a slot outside. Usually you'll be put in a double/shared cell, but if like me you have the luck of the Irish on your side you may get a single. That, by rights, should be your first day over with.

Your cell will be furnished with a metal bed, a wash basin (which we had to wash, drink and clean in), a table, chair and cabinet of some sort. Not forgetting a barred window and a fuck off big steel door! There's also a bog (no seat!), a buzzer on the wall is installed for use in emergencies although they'll get the hump if you use it (take my word for it). Finally I mustn't forget the handy spy hole fitted to the door so the screws can keep an eye on you. A light switch allowed me to decide when I wanted to go to sleep, though I know other nicks have a lights out policy. Your cell will be on a landing/level on a wing. The wing usually consists of 3 to 4 levels with anything up to 60 cells a level, (some older prisons have more). Wandsworth's wings were quite big. There are nets between the landings for obvious reasons. Each level should have a recess for hot water and a shower area. At Wandsworth we were meant to get a shower at last once a week, however, like a lot of prison life if you don't ask you don't get. There are phones on each landing which in Wandsworth worked on a list system, I preferred this as in Belmarsh it was a free for all and a flash point for aggro. The bullies would push in etc. The bottom level houses the kitchen/servery and cleaners cells.

Many prisons have an induction period. This is usually a week on a wing with other inductees, designed to show you the ropes etc. For some reason I was left on 'A' wing and forgotten about which suited me fine as it meant I had a single cell. However it also meant a week of not knowing what the fuck was going on! I soon sussed out the routine though.

At Wandsworth the routine in question goes something like this:
8am/9am breakfast. 11.30am/12.30pm lunch. 4.30pm/5.30pm dinner. At these times you are unlocked. You grab your plate, cup etc., walk a designated route to the kitchen, get your grub, walk a designated route back to your cell and wait outside until a screw unlocks your door. Always close your door when you leave your cell as for some reason stuff goes missing. There's a lot of criminals about! By this time your food should be suitably cold enough to warrant it inedible. All diets are catered for inside with special packs for vegans including soya milk and marmite. There's also halal and kosher so state your preferences. Each week at Wandsworth a menu sheet will mysteriously appear under your door and you tick the various boxes for the coming week. When you go down for each meal you give your cell number to the helpful arse-lick orderly who will shout a number to the next brown nose behind the servery. Other than meal times I personally didn't venture out much. Wanno is a 23 hour bang up nick., so you get 1 hour a day exercise (weather permitting). This entails a trip to the yard where several hundred cons walk in a circle, sit and chat or play cards. Not exactly a fun filled experience and a fairly isolating one if you don't know anybody. Other inmates refrain from coming over and being pally, in my experience they'll usually only talk to you if they are after something. I went to the yard a few times a week just to change the scenery and get some fresh air.

Association: This grand event is meant to happen on a regular basis but invariably doesn't. At Belmarsh it was every night, at Wanno it was once a fortnight! Association is an hour of pool, cards, ping bloody pong and table football, a time to get to know your fellow wrongdoers. I didn't bother with association as I was only doing a few months. (...) Again the choice is yours. Wandsworth was geared more towards separation and isolation anyway. They know that it's at these times that trouble is likely to flare anytime, anywhere. At least once a day the bells would go mental. If it all kicks off you are locked into the nearest place with a lock on it until

the screws have 'dealt' with the situation. The tension people feel in the nick is never far from the surface and fights are fairly common but quickly dealt with. They are usually to do with drugs or borrowing, people not paying what they owe, it's up to you. I only swapped stuff. People rarely give you something for nothing inside. You may think someone is being kind when really you then owe them.

You may be offered work and/or education in prison. Unless you are doing a sizeable stretch you probably won't get offered either. I was more than happy not to get any work at Wanno as it's 1-demeaning, 2-fucking slavery! Others have been punished for refusing work and you can be nicked for it. It's usually some mind-numbingly boring production line shite, for a local scab firm. It's true to say the economic prison is alive and well in Britain. Education is a hard one. All the decent courses are taken by people serving long sentences which is fair enough. So again, if you're only having a lie down (as they say), don't bother. Some people though may benefit from certain courses. Again it's how you want to spend your time. If nothing else it's a reason to get out of the cell and break the boredom.

Every prison has a library, which you can use. I can never help laughing at the amount of 'true crime' books that are available. Books are a great way to pass the time so it's well worth a visit. If nothing grabs your imagination you can always have books sent in, though certain topics may not be accepted. Check with the prison first.

Most religions are catered for inside with prayer mats etc. allowed. Though let's face it – if your god hasn't helped you so far what's the point! A good number of inmates, particularly long termers, turn to some form of religion. You are meant to be visited by the Chaplain in the first week. Thankfully I never saw the fucker. There are services like the Samaritans, The Board of Visitors and The Listeners who are basically prisoners that will listen if you feel unable to cope or have a problem. They get brownie points for this and I did hear of a case of a listener passing on confidences to the screw so be careful what you say! How effective this lot are I can't say but with the suicide rate in prison they can't be that great. Still, they may help some people. Personally, I reckon letters are the best therapy you can have while inside. Knowing you were not forgotten and alone meant a great deal to me and gave me a lot of strength. A lot of cons get no outside contact at all so I counted myself lucky. Prisoner support is vital, even a card saying hello can lift someone's day.

Applications: These are slips that must be filled in whenever you want to see the senior officer to request wing change, use the phone etc. They should be available each evening on your landing. As regards to what you can have property wise while inside, again it differs from nick to nick. Every prison has a property sheet which tells you what you can and can't have. Some stuff can be posted in but most must be handed in. Always send money in postal order form.

Canteen: This is your once weekly chance to buy a few goodies from the shop. Again, a ghostly sheet will appear from which you decide what to buy. Tick it off and hand it back in to whoever collects them. What you can spend depends on 1. How much is in your account and 2. How much the bastards will let you spend. Always check the contents in the see through bag before opening it as the screws will not believe things are missing otherwise. Mistakes are pretty common so beware!

Visits: Obviously very important to your sanity! I f on remand you are entitled to a lot more visits than if convicted. Usually up to three a week. If convicted it's more likely to be once a fortnight (more if in open prison). Visits last for between 45 minutes and an hour, depending on the prison. They usually allow 3 adults and 1 child. The prisoner is responsible for sending the visiting order (V.O) out. The names and addresses of those visiting must be on the V.O and those visiting must bring proof of who they are. Property and cash can be handed in on a visit though this can depend on how the screws are feeling on the day. I f they suspect any funny-business they can pull you off a visit and strip search you (something I had the pleasure of

twice while in Belmarsh) – just keep your hands above the table and tell your crusty mates to have a shave and you should be OK! Visits can be a bit of a high and low experience, you feel great seeing your family and friends but crap going back to the cell. There's a small cafe that your visitors can buy you stuff from, so it's an opportunity to stuff your face. It can take quite a while going from the wing to the visiting hall so be prepared for a wait. This entails holding cells with other prisoners. I've been taken from the cell at 11.30 for a 2.00 visit before!

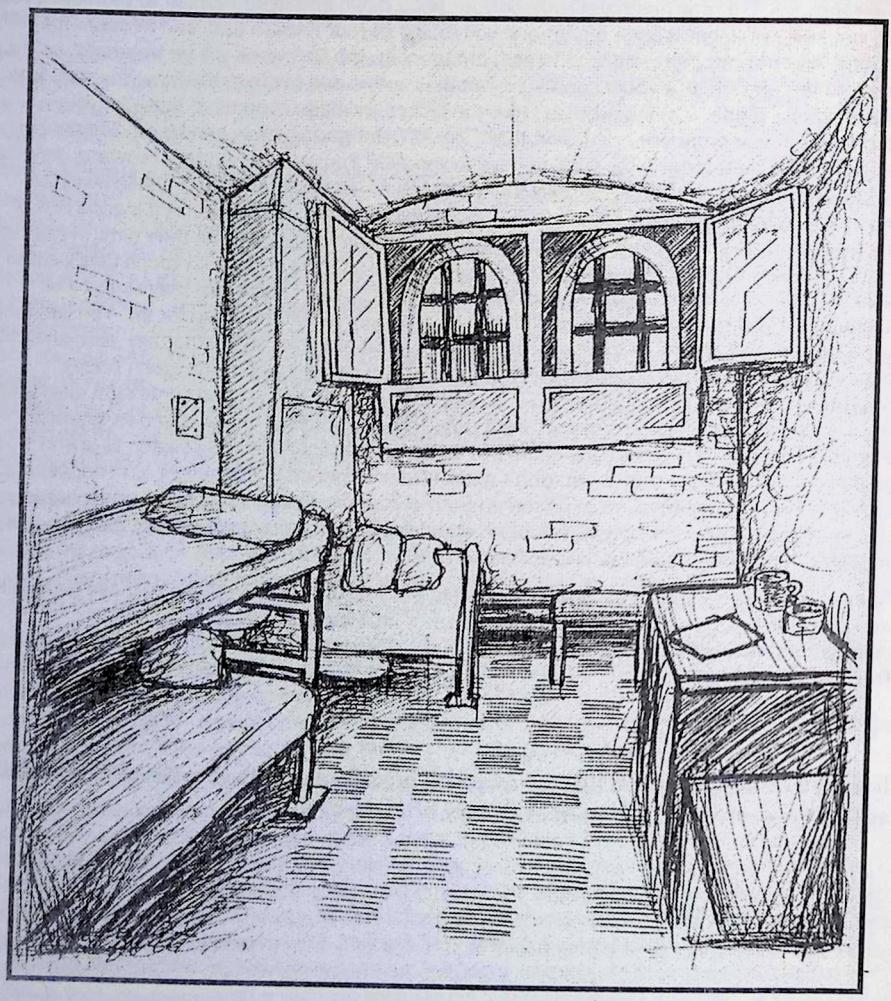
At old-fashioned local nicks like Wandsworth all washing is done by the prison. Don't expect it to be ironed though. If you have prison clothes you'll have a bedding and kit change once a week. You are supposed to have a certain amount of prison issue items in your possession at any time and the screws can give you grief if they 'spin' your cell and find excess kit. Laundry bags are on each landing throughout the week. You get hot water for a cuppa and a chance to empty your bin last thing at night (around 8pm).

All I'll say on the coping front is this. If you are doing a relatively short sentence and just want to get through it, it may be easier to keep your head down and keep yourself to yourself. If you give out shit, you'll get it back big time. If you focus on your release date and fill your time with reading, exercise etc. time will soon pass. Emotionally, the first week will be traumatic, as it's a shock to the system, but you'll soon suss out the routine and get in to the flow. You may feel alienated and alone, even scared as I did, the letters will help lift some of that. Get your friends to get you on prisoner support lists. The ABC are good people and Haven Distribution can get books sent in for free. Also, believe in yourself! You're right and they're wrong. Anyone that gives you crap in prison is a bully and an arsehole. Remember, a lot of these twats are just as scared and are putting on a front. Noone wants to get in to fights, as it means loss of privileges and a spell down the block! Most cons just want to get on with their time. Try not to get in to debt with anyone or give stuff away. If people see you as an easy touch they'll come back for more. Try to remember it's just time and it will pass. I know that may sound a bit insensitive if you're doing a long stretch but all I can say is that it worked for me. You can meet some decent people and, surprisingly, some with great outlooks on life that are quite anarchic in their own way. People often get this image of prison being a gloomy dungeon where everybody walks around with their chin on the floor. All I can say is I had some right laughs and met some really funny blokes inside. Rent out some old porridge videos and piss yourself laughing! Alright, it isn't a holiday camp but it can be bearable! Also don't listen to prison gossip, it's invariably wrong. If you don't hear it from someone in authority it ain't happening. Luckily I only had a short time in prison on both occasions. Others have had it much harder, with screws paying them special attention etc. If they want to the bastards can make your life hell, as some good people know only too well.

Finally I'd like to dedicate this article to all activists presently confined and to those good folk who take the time to try to make prisoners lives a little more bearable.
Respect and revolution
The Lambeth Liaison

It should be borne in mind that the reception procedure described in this article, as well as the layout of wings and so on, will vary from prison to prison.

"with the threat of prison hanging over my head I try to find out as much as I possibly can about the prison I am likely to be sent to...I worry about what the other prisoners are like, will I fit in, how much stuff I can take with me, will I be on my own or sharing...When I arrive different questions become a problem: where do I go to eat, to shower where is everything, this place is big.
After you come out of prison, take a holiday or rest, to give yourself time to adjust to being out again and having space to move about. Give yourself time and tell others how you are feeling."
Tracy Hart



"Prisons and prison experiences vary enormously...The first time I went to a British prison was one of the most hellish weeks of my life: I was beaten up by the guards, denied a vegan diet, taken before the governor three times (and threatened with everything from the punishment block to the psychiatric wing) and put in a cell with someone in for murder and someone in for manslaughter. In contrast, much of my 5 months in another prison was a leisurely rest – badminton, jogging, table tennis, evening classes, my own cell, passable vegan food, friendly enough screws."
Stephen Hancock

Handy tips

- Toothpaste is great for sticking stuff to walls
- If you know you are facing a spell inside either: 1- pack a bag as you may not get access to any clobber or stuff for a while. 2 – do a runner
- Always pack or get sent in a pair of shower flip flops as foot rot is rampant inside ... urrrgh!
- Get yourself on mailing lists. Prisoner support is vital.
- Try not to borrow or lend, it can lead to trouble.
- Don't tell your business to all and sundry unless you're sure they are trustworthy
- Don't go asking others what they are in for, it's not the done thing! If people want to tell you they will.
- Postal orders are they only safe way to send money into prison.
- You can make belts out of sheets or pillowcases.
- If in doubt ask!
- If the people visiting you are in receipt of benefits they may be able to claim back travel expenses

Day 2432

I wake shivering at around 7.00 am. Despite wearing all of the few items of clothing issued, the solitary blanket (not even a proper blanket at that) could not keep out the biting cold. But after several nights like this I have slept. and dreamt. Unusual, and, a mixed blessing, bringing back haunting memories of my former happy life, my children, my ex-partner. A life so far away now it's recollection in such vivid tones disturbs me. I rise from the iron bed frame, which creaks and groans as if in echo of how I feel. Everything around me is cold to the touch, most of all the bare stone floor. I put on prison issue slippers, the only footwear I'm allowed in the segregation unit. I wash my face in the cold water and begin exercising to try and get some warmth back into my bones. The Judas flap is opened for the first time of the day, and a screw peers in, flipping the light off and on.

It's Sunday, so the routine is running somewhat later than usual. At around 7.30 am some form of triangle is clattered, then around 8.15 am the door is unlocked for breakfast. I emerge from my cell to be greeted by a dozen screws competing to see who can pull the sourest face. I walk a few feet to the hotplate to collect my food, and then return to my cell. Disaster! I forgot to make an application for exercise, so I must spend the whole of the next 24 hours in the cell.

The cell is 13 foot x 7 foot with walls and ceiling of white, and bright fluorescent light overhead. There is a barred window with a narrow mesh cage outside the bars. Above this, cutting off the sky, is another cage. Apart from the bed there is a 'cardboard table' and 'chair', the latter unusable, the former not much better. There is also a stainless steel sink and a vile smelling toilet.

I eat my breakfast. I have been given no bread ration all the time I have been in the seg unit, nor have I been given my tea ration. I sip some cold water. I find my mind going back again and again to the dream. All my property has been withheld from me, I have absolutely nothing. I managed to get hold of a pen after a few days because I was required to fill out an official form, and am writing this on the back of an old envelope. Feeling cold again I do some more exercises and pace the cell to keep warm. Lunch is at 11.00 am, mushroom soup, it tastes of week old milk.

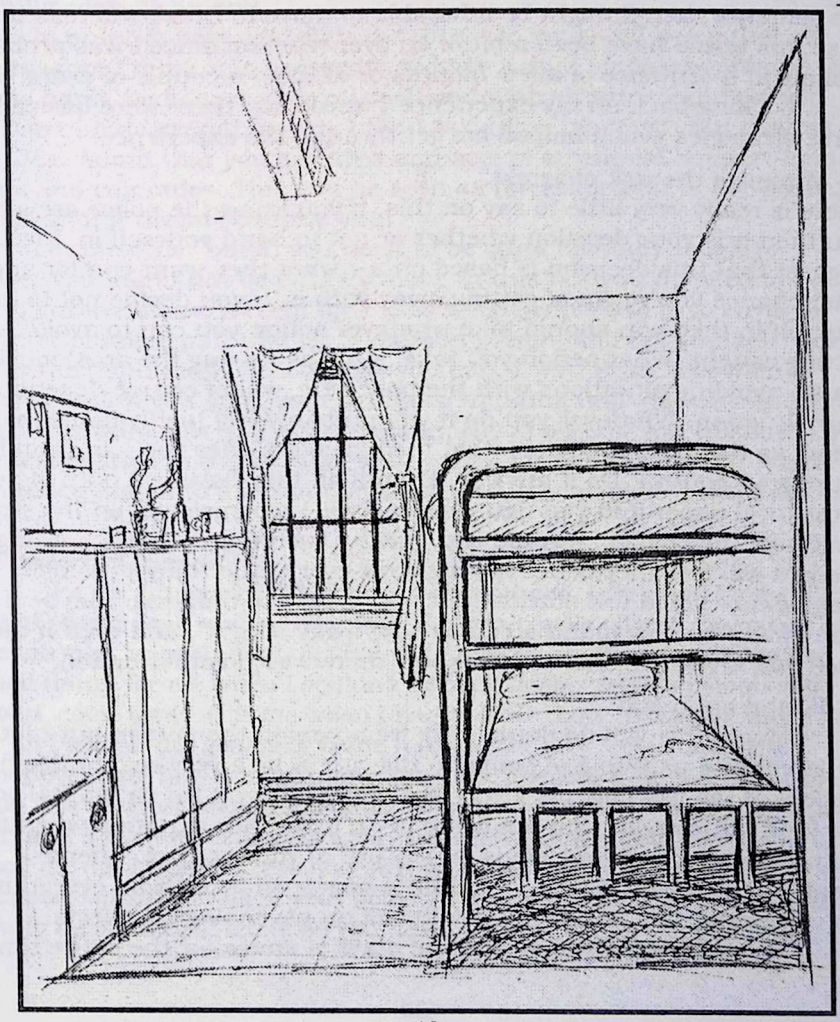
Outside snow is falling slowly through the bars of the roof cage. I can't see if it settles on the ground, all I can see is the stained concrete of the wall opposite my cell. Throughout the afternoon I wait for the weekly shower, a ritual whereby several screws stand around making offensive comments while a prisoner takes a hurried shower but I'm missed out of this. I haven't had a shower in the five days I've so far spent in the prison.

Also on Sunday afternoons is the weekly kit change, when replacement bedding and clothing is issued. The total issue is 2 sheets, 1 pillowcase, 2 towels, 2 pairs of underpants, 2 pairs of nylon socks, 2 tee shirts, and 1 boiler suit. The boiler suit is actually designed to be worn by High Risk prisoners in transit between prisoners, and should be worn over other clothing. I'm missed out of the kit exchange, also, the screws have been true to their word to 'stitch me up'. The final meal of the day is served just after 3.30 pm, leaving 16 hours until breakfast.

In the evening I spend an hour running the length of the cell, doing press-ups, sit-ups, etc - partly for exercise, partly to keep warm, and partly to have something to do. After this I wash out my spare pair of socks in the sink, hanging them on the

bed frame to dry, though that may take a couple of days in this cold. I still have another few hours to kill before I turn in for the night, when the cold and boredom just get too much - about 8.00 pm.

I make up my bed carefully to take advantage as best I can of the meagre coverings. The blanket is actually a strip cell blanket, designed more for indestructibility than warmth, two pieces of nylon cloth sewn together, and scarcely bigger than the mattress. So first I lay down a sheet and tuck it in, then the blanket, over this I lay my two towels. Finally I cover these with my second sheet and tuck it in tightly. At just after 8.00 pm I turn out the light and slide myself, fully clothed, between the bottom sheet and the blanket, hoping I'll get a few hours sleep sometime during the night, and wondering how many more days I'll have to spend living like this.



The following article is not about being in prison, but about being wanted. I have included it this pamphlet because it is obviously connected and because I think some of it will be useful to those who do get caught as well as to those who don't.

On the run

I've never been inside, I managed not to get caught, but I have experienced the stress and fear of facing arrest which would have meant certain imprisonment. Others were arrested and went to prison for the same offence and for a few months it looked very likely that I would too.

What I am writing here is a few pointers to how I survived the experience. It is obviously not a blue print for anyone wanted by the police as circumstances will vary hugely. If for example you are facing a life sentence then it might be advisable to move to Brazil whereas in my case this would have been a bit of an over reaction since I was probably looking at a sentence of a few months or at most a couple of years!

Looking back on my experience I would say there were basically three strategies which helped me get through the experience:

1 - Minimise the risk of arrest.

There is really very little to say on this. If you know the police are after you then it is your decision whether or not to hand yourself in. I would suggest that this decision is based on a – what they want you for and b – what chance you've got of getting away with it. If you decide not to hand yourself in then you should take whatever action you can to avoid getting caught. What action you take, such as leaving the area, moving house, avoiding situations with the police etc, will of course depend upon your situation. Whatever you do it will probably feel highly inadequate seeing as the main problem – that the police are after you – is entirely out of your control. Do it anyway. Even if all they have is a crap picture in the local paper and you figure no cop will recognise you on the street, don't take the chance. I would say, having been there, that if nothing else you will feel a lot better having done every little thing possible. Imagine how you'd feel starting a 2 year sentence thinking "maybe if I'd gone away for a few months I'd have got away with it", and even if they catch you anyway at least you'll know there was no other option.

2 – Mental approach

Again this will no doubt vary from person the person but I found the stress and paranoia of being on the run to be a very real problem. The fear of the unknown is a very big issue: Will you get caught? If so how long will you do? You are living in an uncertain situation when the main thing affecting your life is largely out of your control. Friends, lovers, freedom, you can at any minute be ripped away from everything you value, and this insecurity has knock on psychological effects.

You will be kept in a constant state of stress for the entire time

which could be months or even longer. The effects of stress may vary from person to person but none of them are pleasant.

You will also no doubt get a bit paranoid: is that car you've never noticed before staking out your hiding place? Will someone grass you up? Will the cop on the street recognise you? When the phone rings is it someone warning you that the cops have been round your house?

You should expect that all this mental pressure will manifest itself in various ways, none of them good. It might affect your confidence, your relationships with people and generally make you feel unwell or depressed. Try to expect this, (without dwelling on it too much) and when it happens see it for what it is: not something wrong with you but rather the inevitable consequence of a situation which one day will hopefully come to an end.

In order to best deal with the threat to your well being that all this presents I think it is necessary to have a dual mental approach. On the one hand, be honest with yourself and with others about how you feel. Don't bottle everything up, I tend to do this too much but it is not a good idea. Admit that you a scared and accept emotional support from friends and comrades. This can be seen as releasing a bit of the pressure in order that it doesn't destroy you!

On the other hand, you need to be quite mentally tough to survive. You might not be entirely alone in this but you do need to be able to survive alone. A technique that some people use is to envisage the worst possible outcome (eg 5 years in prison) and tell yourself "I can handle this" and really believe that you can. If you think this then it becomes real. If you start your sentence thinking that you can't survive it then this will show in the way you appear to others, you will stand out as an easy target and your time will be a lot harder as a result. Whatever you think going in to a situation can often turn out to be a self fulfilling prophecy.

3 – Support of friends

The importance of this cannot be overstated. I was very lucky in that loads of people were really supportive. Various people offered me money and places to stay, went through my house to remove anything incriminating, fetched things for me when I couldn't go back home, provided emotional support, came away with me when I had to leave, kept in contact with phone calls and letters and generally made it clear that they were concerned. I cannot overstate how much I appreciate this. I believe that had I gone to prison this support from friends and fellow activists would have made all the difference, so as well as saying a very heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped me out I would stress how vital it is that activists engage in this kind of support work. After all, if your activism ever becomes a big threat (and if not why do it?) then it could be you next.

The following two articles were both written by the same person. The first is extracts from her diary, written while she was there. The second is her account of a hunger strike she went on which I have included not so much because it gives an impression of her life in jail, although it does that too, but because it is an inspiring example of someone continuing to resist from the moment she was locked up.

....Then we are at Holloway.
And it's been fine. It's true – no-one really seems to belong here – loads of people in for shop lifting – we chat as they process us. At first, first-timers are wary, old timers loud. Disregarding the warning sign on the wall, we ask what each other is in here for. Many are in shock – they are beginning a year, two, three. Some have children.

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday have all run together...at a quarter to seven an officer bangs on the door of our cell (I share it with 4 others) and yells "Morning Ladies!" Barbara and Karen get up. I sleep until 7.30 when the officer comes back to unlock the door. Nadja and Jamina, two Polish girls who don't speak much English, don't usually bother with breakfast at all. I make my bed, fetch my plastic cup, bowl, plate and cutlery and go 10 feet to the kitchen. I receive a bowl of cornflakes, 2 pieces of bread and some butter (I get served quickly because everyone else, virtually, is queueing for "medication") and go to the toaster room – yes it contains only a toaster – to toast my bread. By this time someone is yelling "rooms please" and we are all locked back in again until 9.30. I eat and wash my dishes and then read or fall asleep again. At 9.30 people who have applied for education (I'm not here for long enough) get let out to go. And if step aerobics or video workout is on (in either of the morning or afternoon sessions) then I go, since you don't have to apply for gym.

Lunch is at midday, and at 1.30 the afternoon session is on. If there is not gym I read and write. Library is only on Tuesdays so I'm trying to make all the books everyone lent me last until then. Tea is 6 pm, and if we are lucky we are out of our rooms until final lock up at 8 pm. Sometimes there are activities on now but nothing I'm particularly interested in – a quiz or bingo. So I normaly get a shower now, or at least take my book out to somewhere besides my room to read. The TV is on now but always soaps – Eastenders etc! We get our post at this point – today I got my first lot – including a letter from ***** who was half wishing himself back in prison where he didn't have to put so much energy in to home life as he does at the moment!

Being vegan is definitely the best option here – if you are vegetarian you get short cut kinds of meals involving cheese, and if you are not you get processed fish-finger type things. If you are vegan you get real vegetables and beans and lentils. And I can see why **** became

obsessed by fresh fruit – even if you choose "fruit" instead of "pudding" each day, as I do, it only means one piece. And I do not bother with tea, as we are given luke-warm water in plastic cups and no herb tea is available. I have to drink lots of water anyway to combat being in a heated environment. Thankfully our windows open! They are in long thin slabs. Outside I can see sky, birds and trees as well as Holloway, and breathe in cold air. I am not at all unhappy. Everywhere there are small choices I can make that give me power over my own life still. Radio 4 and my walkman give me stories to listen to and things to think about. Most women in here have real, long sentences, not to mention children to worry about. It is very easy for me, especially – in fact primarily – because of this manageable time period. It is all possible, for a week, two, three? Do you remember that quote I once read you – "the secret to happiness is being interested in as many things as possible"?

If I stayed here, the thing I should fear the most would be the loss of my thought. Not enough books. Not enough ideas. No lively debates with others who like to discuss all things. I should be desperate to learn in only a few weeks, wanting courses and correspondence subjects, hungrily, fearing above all things that I might become mindless and empty-headed, empty-hearted. Argh! Scary.

Today tears filled my eyes when they said we had to go back inside after half an hour outdoors, my first in 5 days. Today when I came back to bed at final lock up I was feeling knocked about by the loudness, ugliness, artificialness.

I am outside again, ten minutes they said. I revel in my fingers being cold.

The grass on which I am sitting is dew-wet still – first they told me to stay on the path – it is a black bitumen-path that follows an oblong shape around a green middle, and has trees and more green edging it. The other time I was here I was told off for trying to surreptitiously climb one of the trees (which is not an easy thing to do surreptitiously). So then I sat with my back against the tree trunk. I couldn't actually bring myself to imagine myself anywhere else.

Today I went over to the tree again. "Stay on the path" said the office. But a few minutes later, when I tried to explain, she said "go over to the grass in the middle then." So here I sit on the permitted grass, which is dew-wet still. The sun hasn't reached us in here.

Hunger Strike!

When an arrest at Manchester Airport resulted in me spending a week in Risley, I decided, despite the short notice, to have a go at obtaining myself a GM-free diet while I was in (which my own diet was). I hoped that either a) it might get a bit of GM into the media or b) it might make a difference to prisoners in the future. I asked a couple of people to be contacts for GM-free prisoner support (which we invented on the spot) while I was in, so the prison could talk to them and they could have a go at getting some media. At my reception at Risley I handed in a statement explaining that I would be "hunger striking for the right of prisoners to be guaranteed a diet free from genetically manipulated food if they request this."

It took about 3 days for prison red tape to do something about the fact that I wasn't eating, but at that point I was moved to the hospital wing, where the wing nurse talked to me and said she could get me whatever I wanted from the kitchens, if I would agree to eat. She asked me to provide a list of food I would have, and said a governor would probably see me about my letter after the weekend (it was Saturday morning at the time). I said I wasn't happy to eat until I had a guarantee from a governor that future prisoners could specify the GE-free food they would eat and would be provided with it, and I wanted to be able to notify my support group to press release this. After hopefully leaving me alone with an appetising plate of salad, which I bravely ignored!, she then managed to arrange for me to see Governor Pat Nolan the following morning, who said "explain the issue in 25 words for me." After hearing what I had to say, he agreed not only to provide me with a GM-free diet, but also that it would appear reasonable to say future prisoners can ask for a GM-free diet, since the kitchen staff saw no problem with providing this alternative. He then took me to the kitchen to meet them, where they'd set out on a bench all their cooking items they were unsure about! My diet for the rest of my stay was mostly salads, organic soya milk, and fruit.

Section 2
Prisoner Solidarity

NO BORDERS

At our optimum, our actions are not just for prisoner support but to defy all that prison is. Prison is the separation of the "free" outside and the caged inside. It is the control of everyday life. It is punishment and isolation. It is spirit breaking and confidence crushing. It is life by the clock, confinement in concrete. It is perhaps the furthest we can be taken from a natural state of being.

On the outside we are afraid of prison. Prison controls not just those within it's walls but all of us, by it's very existence. We are afraid of the loss of many things; freedom, spontaneity, true warm friendship, love, trees, sun....all that which is restricted on the outside is denied us entirely when in jail.
Just like the cops are in our heads and not just on the streets, there are bars in our minds as well as on the windows. Prison has a different language, culture, mental state. It is a different country. This gives us more to fight. This gives us more ground to fight on. At war with what prison does to it's inhabitants, we need to act on the outside *with*, not on *behalf of* those inside. We can cross such borders in endless ways, exchange pieces of that which we cherish. Here are a few of my experiences that seemed to me to pass through, overcome the physical, emotional, mental constraint of outside and inside.

I'm in Den Haag in Holland, outside the courts. A few of us are waiting for our friend to see if she will be taken to prison or released. The solicitor comes out and tells us she is being taken to prison until the climate change conference is over, and also that she is in a terrible depressed state.
We postpone our tickets home. We collect over 40 letters and postcards, send these into her. We stay awake late making flyers and banners for a noise demonstration, commonplace in mainland Europe. I happen to be in the legal office when she calls. I tell her we are coming, and she tells me where her cell is, which street to be on so she can see us. She sounds excited, and I am delighted to hear her voice.
150 of us are on the street by the prison, banging drums, some simple samba sounds, letting distress flares and fireworks off. there is fire-juggling and acrobatics, we are all dancing, people climbing up trees and waving to her window. We scream ourselves hoarse for an hour and a half. The Dutch tell us it is the biggest and longest noise demonstration the Netherlands have seen.

The night before we collect her I can't sleep, I'm nervous about her mental state, that jail may have damaged her. I'm thrilled to be seeing her. We set off early with badly but lovingly made banners, some stolen food, an incredible card signed by all those who had to go home. When finally I see her and hold her, I'm amazed by how well she seems.
She tells us that she loved our noise demonstration, that it felt as if she was there at the carnival, she too was making noise, she too was dancing, she banged on her window so hard it broke. We had bought the carnival beyond the walls of the jail, we had reached her and connected. In those small moments, we had won.
She told us she felt so loved and close to us all, that she was less afraid of prison than she had before. Our support had kept her strong enough that she felt able to carry on resisting and risking. She was in prison but she was dancing with the rest of us. We'd defied their attempt to separate her, or for prison to dampen her rebellion.

Fifteen of us are in the Crown Prosecution Service building in Sheffield, searching for the files they've kept about Mark Barnsley. He wants them released and so do we. The staff are telling us we're not allowed to be there, we're trespassing. We're opening cupboards we're not meant to, the secret world of the courts that we are walking disrespectfully onto. We're only there temporarily, a short time. but for some moments we are in their space and not abiding by their rules, we are roaming freely. We get dragged out soon after, arrested and held for a few hours. we all give "no comment" interviews. They charge us with "conspiracy to commit burglary". But the Sheffield courts can't hear our case because they're the prosecutors so they send us to Hull instead. and eventually, unsurprisingly, they drop the charges.

I'm visiting someone in prison. It's the first time I've been in, the first time we've met. I'm nervous, it's like a blind date with none oF the easy trappings. But we meet and hug and then we talk and we talk and we talk , and it isn't just "prisoner support", it's a friendship. I'm learning about life in prison, he teaches me some prison slang. The more I get to learn oF prison the less alien it seems. It becomes to me a horrible normal place, not a horrible exotic one. These foreigners becoming people not prisoners, de-learning and rebuilding the constructs we have of convicts. It is really different to look forward to letters, to be communicating not out of duty, but from connection.

These feel like a crossing, from one place to another. I want to stress the sheer ordinariness of such things, but that, also, this does not make them unimportant or futile. Our connections and communications with prisoners should be full of meaning to us on the outside, not just letters of duty and responsibility, careless acts of charity. To act with thoughts of our freedom, with what we value and would miss. I dream of burning down Wandsworth prison, and to jail busts - when we turn up the heat perhaps we really can melt the bars. In the waking hours I am still in the small acts, and whilst these don't and can't destroy and mend, they are shards of natural light, stealing in and out like fugitives, crossing over borders we are forbidden to cross.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT PRISONERS

ADOPT A PRISONER

If you're active in a group or campaign why not choose one or two prisoners to consistently support. Pass cards round meetings, send useful stuff, knock up a flyposter and get their case some publicity if they could use it, get in touch with the prisoner's support group if there is one. Of course you can take this on as an individual, too.

WRITING TO PRISONERS/SENDING THINGS

Prison is isolation, so contact with the outside world, letting a prisoner know s/he is not forgotten, helps break this down. Sometimes just a friendly card can boost their morale. Writing for the first time to a complete stranger can be awkward. A card with some well wishes, a bit about who you are and asking what you can do to help is often enough. Don't expect prisoners to write back. Sometimes, the number of letters they can receive/write is restricted, or they just might not be very good at writing back. To help, include a couple of stamps or, if writing abroad, International Reply Coupons (IRC's) that you can get from the post office. Write on clean paper and don't re-use envelopes. Remember a return address, also on the envelope. Ask what the prisoner can have sent to them, as this varies from prison to prison. Books and pamphlets usually have to be sent from a recognised distributor/bookshop/ publisher (ask at a friendly bookshop). Tapes, videos, writing pads, zines, toiletries and postal orders are some of the things you might be able to send. Food just gets eaten by screws.

Remember that all letters are opened and looked through so don't write stuff that could endanger anyone – this doesn't mean you should be over paranoid and write one meaningless comment on the weather after the other. Be prepared to share a bit of your life to brighten up someone's on the inside. e.g. We received a letter from Herman Wallace, after sending him a card from the group.
He says-
" It is quite essential that I take out a moment to express my gratitude to all the wonderful folk who sent me so much love & support in this one card. I am really touched by the intensity of energy from this card and I just had to stand up from my seat and smile. Thank you. Right now, in spite of my repressive condition you guys have made me feel GREAT! "

PROTEST LETTERS

Petitioning Tony Blair asking him to stop being a capitalist bastard might well be futile. But writing letters to relevant places requesting something realistic such as an appeal, transfer, vegan food etc on behalf of a prisoner can help improve their chances. Prisoners who are seen to be 'in the public eye' do tend to be treated better.

OTHER SUPPORT

There is so much more than can be done, up to you and your imagination and your contact with a prisoner, such as: publicity for the case, visits, financial support, pickets of prisons...

Taken from the Brighton ABC website. Address on page 32

Compared to many forms of activism prisoner solidarity can often seem at a first glance to be quite tame and ineffective, weird even. It can seem strange to write to someone you don't know, pointless to bang drums outside a prison watched by no-one but the screws and a few visitors, or write to prison governors asking for a change in a prisoner's treatment. Certainly most activism that many of us are involved in is far more militant and exciting than this. Many of us have sound political reasons why we would never write to our MPs or go on a demonstration about something when we could just as easily, and with far more effect, occupy an office, break a window or pull up a crop. It may be that this is one of the reasons that prisoner support is so often neglected .

What must be remembered is that different tactics work well in different situations, and in the restrictive and isolating context of prison, very small acts can have a large effect. Receiving a letter can be the high point of a prisoners day, while writing to a prison governor can lead to a prisoner receiving better treatment. A simple demonstration outside a prison, or occupation of a related target could have an even greater effect.

All of this is not to say that more militant actions have no place in prisoner support activity. On the contary I think they are essential. Sabotage of companies using prison labour, harassment and home visits to offending governors and screws, and any other effective action against relevant targets should be carried out in support of those behind bars, as and when the need arises. In between times though, the more mundane, but also more accessible and equally important, work of fundraising, letter writing, pickets and noise demos needs to be continued and increased.

"When writing to prisoners, supporters or friends should always try and make letters as positive as possible, there is nothing more soul destroying than negative letters. Also enclose a S.A.E. If you want a reply it helps prisoners to conserve valuable funds. When writing to animal rights prisoners or other political prisoners do not write anything that may be incriminating (obviously) or which could be seen as incitement as you do the prisoner or yourself no favours.
We had excellent support from people outside. I would say to people who are supporting a prisoner that a letter no matter how mundane can make a big difference to your day."
Mel. Animal Rights prisoner serving 6 months.

Send bright cards or funny ones. Yellow and red really cheered up the wall of my cell.

If possible arrange a specific time a prisoner can call you. I found it so frustrating and expensive always getting answer phones.

Before going to jail, arrange for a person on the outside to be able to send on letters as some jails restrict access to stamps. I used to write a load of letters, send them all to a friend with the addresses, and he'd put stamps on them and send them on.

Jenny. Peace prisoner serving 4 months

This article was originally going to be in section 1 but I have included it here because it shows very clearly the importance of prisoner support , and the positive effect that it, and the continuation of the struggle, can have on the prisoner.

An incredibly empowering experience

I wrote a rant in prison. It was the kind of piece you write when you're about to get sent down for blowing something up, not for allegedly causing the equivalent of a shaving cut on a security guard's face with a champagne glass during a scuffle! But hey, I was feeling dramatic - it being my first time in jail, and more than that now, it reminds me how powerful, supported and politically clear I felt while I was inside.

I was arrested at the start of protests attempting to shut down the Climate Change Conference in November 2001 during an action at the launch of C02e.com, a carbon emissions trading company. The first three days in police holding cells were pretty terrible. I saw the friend I had been arrested with released (no more duets of "You're scum and you know you are" hummed - because we didn't want them to know we were English, at the guards into the night!) and many others come and go. After being told I was fucked and being charged with assault by cops who'd obviously learnt their English from some cheesy American action movies ("Ah, I see you are hard, you are very hard"), I didn't hear anything for two days and received only a vacuous dinner party novel and the memoirs of a pacifist anarcho-syndicalist, literary choices I cannot imagine any of my friends committing!

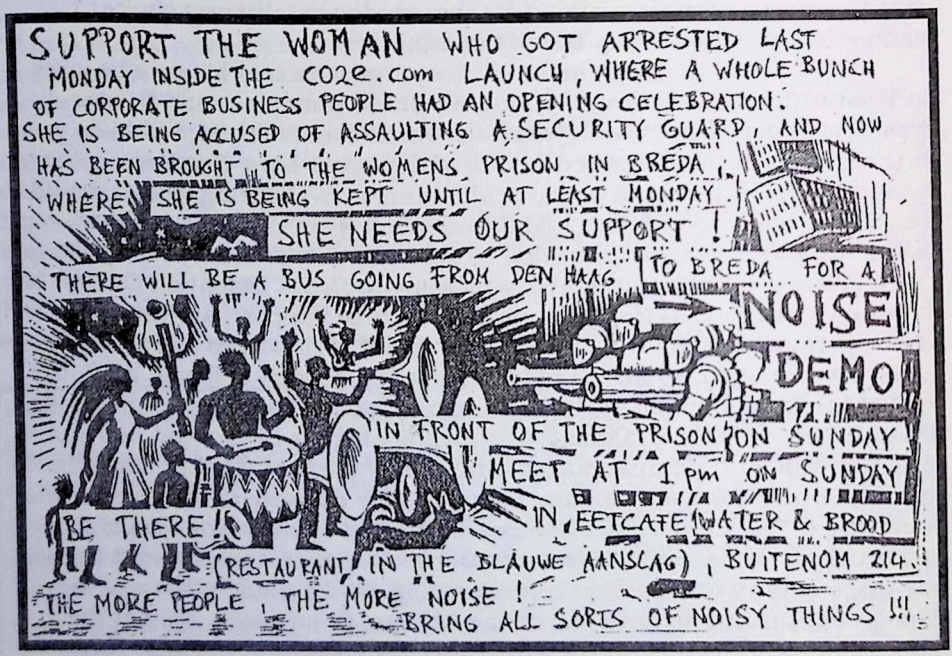
On Thursday, I was taken to the judge who said I was to be jailed at least until the following Monday when the protests would be over. I was devastated. I knew everyone was outside and all I wanted to do was hug my mates and get caned at one of the squat bars. But I was going to prison. I'd been thinking about it all summer. Wondering what it would be like, wondering whether I could handle it. I cried when I left the judge, and I cried in prison too, but one of the most extraordinary weeks of my life had begun. Even though they took me to Breda Detention Centre, 80 miles away from Den Haag, inspiring letters of support, a noise demo and my amazing friends all eventually found their way to me.

I was locked up for 22 hours a day in a solitary cell with a TV, a loaf of bread, chocolate sprinkles and a toilet. In the police holding cells, I had found a cartoon of one Smurf pieing another Smurf and had stuck it to the wall with peanut butter. And one of the first things I saw when I turned on the TV was someone pieing the US delegate and footage of the storming of the Conference Centre. Frustrated at not being part of it, nonetheless there was a feeling of strength because even if they'd banged me up, so many others were outside doing what I would otherwise be doing - continuing to act against the Climate Conference, against the state, against the cops on the street and the cops in our heads. This

prison was just one of many: whether it was schools, jobs, depression, economies, nation states. And inside were inspiring people who were also fucked off and hadn't been afraid to express it, even if rebellion is often encouraged to find a self-destructive route.

The piece de resistance came on my final night. I knew it was coming but when it arrived I was still dumbfounded that people had gone to the trouble. And I tried to tell as many people inside as possible what was happening so they would know what it was and that it was for everyone inside, not just for me. The noise demo lasted for an hour and a half, and I banged along to the ever more sophisticated rhythms being played out on dustbin lids and saucepans so hard that I broke my window! From my cell, I could see orange and pink explosions and hear the songs and cacophony. It was brilliant.

My experience was unique because it was during a protest when lots of people were active, around, and motivated. This isn't always or usually the case. Prison support for political and "non-political" prisoners and finding ways to attack the prison industry from within and without (although this boundary is about to get blurred with the increase in electronic tagging which could be said to take the person out of the prison and put the prison in the person) is one of the most important things we do. To have your freedom taken away from you in a moment is a terrifying thing, but it was also for me, because brief and in the context so well supported, an incredibly empowering experience.


SUPPORT THE WOMAN WHO GOT ARRESTED LAST MONDAY INSIDE THE CO2e.com LAUNCH, WHERE A WHOLE BUNCH OF CORPORATE BUSINESS PEOPLE HAD AN OPENING CELEBRATION.
SHE IS BEING ACCUSED OF ASSAULTING A SECURITY GUARD, AND NOW HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO THE WOMENS PRISON IN BREDA, WHERE SHE IS BEING KEPT UNTIL AT LEAST MONDAY.
SHE NEEDS OUR SUPPORT!
THERE WILL BE A BUS GOING FROM DEN HAAG TO BREDA FOR A NOISE DEMO
IN FRONT OF THE PRISON ON SUNDAY
MEET AT 1 pm ON SUNDAY IN EETCAFE WATER & BROOD (RESTAURANT IN THE BLAUWE AANSLAG), BUITENOM 214.
BE THERE!
THE MORE PEOPLE, THE MORE NOISE!
BRING ALL SORTS OF NOISY THINGS!!!

This is taken from an interview between Rob Thaxton and Jeffrey 'Free' Luers, both serving time in the US, for anti-capitalist and Earth Liberation activities respectively.

ROB: I'm sort of underwhelmed with the support I've gotten so far. I'm not gonna knock anyone, though our movement - such as it is - doesn't have a lot of experience with real oppression, so most of our lip service supporters are at a loss as to what to do, other than send reading material and money. And I sincerely appreciate having that sort of support. Still, I would like to be more involved with what's happening out there beyond those big, gray walls. As far as being the subject of graffiti, hey - what red-blooded, rock-slinging, cop-assaulting, rioting anarchist wouldn't be honored by that?
It's totally understandable that folks out there don't know how to help out, considering all the petty rules prisoncrats arbitrarily throw up to discourage and limit access between us and the outside world. It takes a lot of time and effort to be involved with prisoners as allies and comrades. Being friends - pen pals, even - is much easier and the people who've been writing for a while have made a lot of difference to my time in here. I can't imagine how I'd have managed so far without them. Other than contacts and friends I had from my previous existence, all these folks got my contact information from zines or prisoner listings on the internet.
So, I enjoy the attention, but I'd like to feel like I'm still part of the struggle, instead of a fallen martyr.
What are some of the ways you think people could help us out more? All the ideas I have would take a lot of resources and effort, more effort than one or two people could be expected to do. How about you?

FREE: Well, some of the obvious things that come to mind are writing the governor. It might not seem like much, but there is always the possibility it can help us legally. If nothing else, it shows we have support and that makes it less likely we'll get fucked with.
Second, stop treating us like a cause. We're human beings and not abstract enemies. A lot of people have gone on, without my consent, to speak on my behalf, to claim to represent me. That really disturbs me - that is the exact process/system/attitude I struggle against. If you really want to get involved, contact me. Talk to me about what I want, what you can do to help. If you don't want to get involved, but want to show a level of support - write letters. It may be hard to believe, but very few people actually continue a correspondence. I'd really like to form new friendships.
We are in here as an example, our sentences are meant to be a deterrent to dissent. Actions of solidarity show them that the voice of revolution will not be silenced because a few of us have fallen. We must continue to increase the pressure on all fronts. The continuation of the struggle is the greatest form of support, because it gives us hope that one day there will no longer be a corrupt, oppressive power to keep us behind these walls.
While there are so many ways to support us, and I can't possibly write or even think of them all, a combination of all the above would be so awesome.

Contacts

Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network
Support those imprisoned for actions in defence of the earth and its inhabitants.
BM Box 2407, London WC1N 3XX, www.geocities.com/earthlibprisoner
animalearthliberation@bigfoot.com

Brighton Anarchist Black Cross
Support class struggle and anarchist prisoners.
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK. mail@brightonabc.org.uk
www.brightonabc.org.uk

Bristol Anarchist Black Cross
c/o Kebele, 14 Robertson Rd, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY, UK. bristol_abc@yahoo.co.uk
www.geocities.com/bristol_abc

Class War Prisoners
Classwaruk@hotmail.com

Animal Liberation Front Supporters Group
Support animal liberation prisoners and other ALF activities.
BCM 1160, London WC1N 3XX

Vegan Prisoner Support Group
PO Box 194, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 4YL 020 82 92 83 25
hvpc@vpsg.freeserve.co.uk www.cares.demon.co.uk/vpsg

Prisoners Advice Service
Offer advice & information by legal professionals to prisoners, particularly concerning prisoners' rights and prison rules. Take up prisoners' complaints about their treatment by the prison system.
Unit 210, Hatton Square. 16 - 16a Baldwins Gardens, EC1N 7RJ 020 7405 8090
www.prisonersadvice.org.ukpas@tinyworld.co.uk

Haven Distribution
An anarchist project providing free books to prisoners.
BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX

Women in Prison
Charity offering support and advice to women prisoners.
22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA admin@womeninprison.org.uk

Justice for Mark Barnsley Campaign
Mark is out of jail on license but the campaign continues, to overturn his conviction and with it the constant risk of re-imprisonment. Currently raising money for legal appeal.
PO Box 381, Huddersfield, HD1 3XX www.freemarkbarnsley.com

Freedom and Justice for Samar and Jawad
BM Box FOSA, London, WC1N 3XX postmaster@freesaj.org.uk www.freesaj.org.uk

Free and Critter Legal Defense Fund
Raising money for legal appeals.
PO Box 11922, Eugene, OR 97440, USA

Donations for Rob Thaxton can be sent to: Rob Los Ricos, PO Box, 50634, Eugene, OR 97405, USA